

Message Text

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12
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: MPOL, NATO, UK
SUBJ: UK DEFENSE REVIEW - PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE, DECEMBER 16, 1974

MISSION HAS RECEIVED COPY OF DECEMBER 19, 1974 LETTER, WITH
ATTACHMENT, FROM UK PERMREP (PECK) TO SYG LUNS CONCERNING
DECEMBER 16 PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE OF UK DEFENSE REVIEW.

BEGIN TEXT OF LETTER:

1. SOME OF MY COLLEAGUES HAVE RAISED WITH ME THE IMPLICATION
OF THE DEBATE WHICH TOOK PLACE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON
16 DECEMBER ON THE UK DEFENCE REVIEW, WHICH ENDED WITH A VOTE
IN SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION. THERE MAY HAVE BEEN
SOME MISUNDERSTANDING THAT THIS VOTE REPRESENTED A FINAL
ENDORSEMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS, THUS UNDERMINING
THE PURPOSE OF CONSULTATION WITHIN THE ALLIANCE. I SHOULD
THEREFORE LIKE TO CLARIFY THE POSITION.

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2. WHEN MR. MASON MADE HIS STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE ON
3 DECEMBER (COPIES OF WHICH I CIRCULATED HERE ON THE SAME
DAY) IT WAS RELATIVELY BRIEF BECAUSE OF PRESSURES OF
PARLIAMENTARY TIME. THE GOVERNMENT THSREFORE PROMISED THAT

THERE WOULD BE AN EARLY OPPORTUNITY TO DEBATE THE PROPOSALS. THIS WAS ARRANGED FOR MONDAY 16 DECEMBER, AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE THE GOVERNMENT TABLED A MOTION FOR DEBATE TO THE EFFECT THAT "THIS HOUSE TAKES NOTE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE'S STATEMENT ON 3 DECEMBER 1974". THE OPPOSITION THEN TABLED AN AMENDMENT ADDING THE WORDS "AND REGRETS THAT THE PROPOSALS CONTAINED IN THE STATEMENT WILL IMPERIL THE NATION'S SECURITY". THIS AMENDMENT WAS DEFEATED ON MONDAY EVENING, WITH A GOVERNMENT MAJORITY OF SIXTY.

3. HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS HAS TAKEN NOTE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS DOES NOT CHANGE THE STATUS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS NOR DOES IT IMPLY THAT ANY FINAL DECISIONS HAVE BEEN TAKEN. MR. MASON ON MONDAY TOOK GREAT PAINS TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT, AS HE HAD SAID HIMSELF AT THE DPC ON 10 DECEMBER, WITHIN THE RESOURCES THAT COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR DEFENCE, THE PROPOSALS ANNOUNCED ON 3 DECEMBER WERE PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS RATHER THAN FINAL DECISIONS. I AM ATTACHING SOME RELEVANT EXTRACTS FROM MR. MASON'S SPEECH WHICH UNDERLINE THIS POINT. THE REMAINDER OF THE SPEECH WAS LARGELY DEVOTED TO EXPLAINING THE PROPOSALS IN MORE DETAIL THAN HAD BEEN POSSIBLE ON 3 DECEMBER, ALTHOUGH BECAUSE OF SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS THESE DETAILS WERE LESS PRECISE THAN THOSE GIVEN BY FIELD MARSHAL SIR MICHAEL CARVER IN HIS PRESENTATION TO THE DPC ON 3 DECEMBER.

4. I SHOULD PERHAPS TAKE THIS OPORTUNITY OF REMINDING MY COLLEAGUES OF THE TIMETABLE FOR THE CONSULTATIVE AND PARLIAMENTARY PROCESS. TO CONFORM WITH PARLIAMENTARY AND BUDGETARY REQUIREMENTS, HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT WISH TO PRESENT A DEFENCE WHITE PAPER BY MID-MARCH 1975. AS YOU KNOW, WE HAVE THEREFORE ASKED THAT THE RESULTS OF THE PROCESS OF CONSULTATION WITH NATO SHOULD BE AVAILABLE IN LONDON NOT LATER THAN 10 FEBRUARY, AND YOU HAVE PROVISIONALLY AGREED TO CALL A MEETING OF THE DPC IN THE WEEK BEGINNING 3 FEBRUARY TO CONSIDER THE MILITARY ASSESSMENT WHICH THE UNCLASSIFIED

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MILITARY COMMITTEE HOPE TO COMPLETE BY 31 JANUARY. HMG WILL THEN HAVE TIME TO CONSIDER THE VIEWS OF THE ALLIANCE BEFORE ARRIVING AT FINAL DECISIONS TO BE INCORPORATED IN THE WHITE PAPER TO BE PUBLISHED IN MID-MARCH.

5. I AM SENDING A COPY OF THIS LETTER AND THE ATTACHMENT TO OUR COLLEAGUES ON THE DPC, TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MILITARY COMMITTEE AND TO THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL FOR DEFENCE PLANNING AND POLICY. END TEXT

BEGIN TEXT OF ATTACHMENT:

EXTRACT FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE'S SPEECH TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, 16 DECEMBER 1974

1. WITHIN THE TOTAL RESOURCES THAT WE CAN DEVOTE TO DEFENCE WE ARE PUTTING FORWARD TO OUR ALLIES AT THIS STAGE PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS RATHER THAN FINAL DECISIONS. FINAL DECISIONS WILL NOT BE TAKEN UNTIL THE PROCESS OF FULL AND MEANINGFUL CONSULTATIONS WITH OUR ALLIES HAS TAKEN PLACE. IN MY RECENT STATEMENT I BRIEFLY INDICATED HOW CONSULTATION IS TO BE FULFILLED, BUT I SHOULD LIKE TO ELABORATE A LITTLE ON THE PROCEDURES INVOLVED AND THE TIMETABLE WE HAVE IN MIND.

2. IN PARALLEL WITH THE STATEMENT OF 3 DECEMBER, WE INFORMED OUR ALLIES OUTSIDE NATO OF THE PROPOSALS WHICH INVOLVE THEM OR THEIR INTERESTS. WE INVITED THEM TO MAKE THEIR VIEWS KNOWN TO US AND OFFERED TO DISCUSS WITH THEM OUR VIEWS ON MINIMISING ANY PROBLEMS WHICH OUR PROPOSALS MIGHT CREATE FOR THEM. WE HAVE ALREADY BEGUN THE DETAILED CONSULTATIONS WITH OUR NATO ALLIES ON THE CHANGES WE PROPOSE TO OUR NATO COMMITMENTS. THERE IS AN ESTABLISHED PROCEDURE FOR THIS, INVOLVING FIRST AN APPRECIATION BY THE NATO MILITARY AUTHORITIES OF ANY PROPOSALS BY A MEMBER COUNTRY WHICH CONSTITUTE A MAJOR CHANGE IN DECLARED FORCES. THIS IS FOLLOWED BY POLITICAL CONSIDERATION OF THE MILITARY ASSESSMENT BY THE NATO DEFENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE. OUR NATO ALLIES ARE NOW CONSIDERING OUR PROPOSALS IN DETAIL. IF WE ARE TO GIVE THEM, AS I AM SURE WE MUST, ADEQUATE TIME TO DIGEST WHAT WE PROPOSE AND TO GIVE US A CONSIDERED REACTION, WE SHALL NOT BE IN A POSITION TO SET OUT OUR FINAL DECISIONS UNTIL THE WHITE PAPER.

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3. IN CONCLUSION, LET ME STRESS THE FOLLOWING POINTS. WE HAVE FRAMED OUR PROPOSALS RESPONSIBLY AND WITH FULL REGARD TO THE NEED TO MAINTAIN THE VIABILITY OF OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE WESTERN ALLIANCE AND THE SECURITY OF THE HOME BASE. HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT ARE SATISFIED THAT THE PROPOSALS DO NOT IMPERIL THE SECURITY OF OUR NATION BUT STRENGTHEN OUR DEFENCE POSTURE, AND WILL ENABLE US TO PLAY OUR PART IN THE DEFENCE OF THE WEST AND ITS FREEDOMS, I BELIEVE, MUCH MORE EFFICIENTLY THAN BEFORE, AND AFTER ALL, A COUNTRY'S DEFENCE WILL ONLY BE AS STRONG AS THE ECONOMY PERMITS. END TEXT
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